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ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that four different "life lines" would affect sex role orientations, specifically intimacy, parenting, grandparenting, and work. Subjects were 74 men and 43 women, white, upper middle class with a mean education level of 14 years. Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, a Life Events scale, and the Retirement Descriptive Index. Results indicated that: (1) age per se did not affect sex role orientation except that females over 45 were more likely to endorse a feminine sex role; (2) married or never-married males were were less androgynous than those divorced, separated, or widowed, with the opposite pattern true for females; (3) having children led to males endorsing a feminine sex role less and females endorsing a feminine sex role more; and (4) life satisfaction correlated with two of the sex role variables, masculinity and androgyny. (Author/HLM)

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Sex Role Orientation Across the Adult Life Span[1]

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Much recent interest has been directed at the course of sex role development in adulthood. Sex-role negotiation in mid and later life has been hypothesized to be characterized by a move toward a more androgynous orientation. In actuality, the literature reveals a web of complexities involved in adult's continuing negotiation of sex role adaptation.

The success with which individuals, for example, may be able to sychronize masculine and feminine qualities appears to vary according to the demands placed by a particular stage (e.g., Neugarten & Hagestead, 1976). More generally, in the present research the development or suppression of androgynous characteristics are seen to be dependent upon individuals experiencing events that initiate a role shift, rather than on age per se. Thus, the particular sex role mode, as well as its adaptive value, expressed at any stage of life should be related to the specializations required of individuals by their current life situations. Specifically, four different "life" lines are hypothesized to bear on sex role orientation: Intimacy, parenting, grandparenting, and work.

METHOD

Subjects

Participants were 74 men and 43 women from the Detroit Metropolitan area. All were white, upper middle class, between the ages of 17 and 73 ($\bar{X}$ = 38.84 years). The mean education level was 14 years.

Procedure

A research booth was set up at two suburban shopping centers. Three

trained interviewers asked individuals to volunteer for a study of changes in life events and personality characteristics over the adult life span and to complete a questionnaire. Approximately 50% of the questionnaires were completed at the shopping centers and the remaining were returned by mail (return rate was 70%).

Task Materials

Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of four parts: a) Demographic information, b) the Bem Sex Role Inventory c) a Life Events scale and d) the Retirement Descriptive Index.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory was used to assess sex role identification (cf. Bem, 1974). All participants indicated on a seven point scale (ranging from "1 - never or almost never true" to "7 - always or almost always true") the extent to which they endorsed masculine and feminine characteristics. On the basis of this self-evaluation, each participant received three major scores: Masculinity (sum of masculinity items), Femininity (sum of femininity items) and Androgyny scores (masculinity score minus femininity score).

The Life Events Scale was modified after Holmes and Rahe (1967) to assess events related to four "life" lines of adulthood: Intimate Relationships, Parenting, Grandparenting, and Work. For each event participants were asked to write in their age when the event occurred. If the event was not relevant to the participants then no age was recorded.

The Retirement Descriptive Index was used to assess life satisfaction (Smith, Kendall & Uhlin, 1969). The forty item scale consisted of a list of descriptive statements which characterized four different aspects of participants' lives: Their activities, Health, Financial Situation and the people they associate with in daily activities. Each participant

indicated on a three point scale (ranging from 1-positive, 0-neutral, -1-negative) the extent to which the items reflected their feelings. All responses were summed by unit weight to form Life Satisfaction scores.

Results

The impact of the participant's age, sex and the four life line events: marital status, parental status, grandparental status, work/career status, on the participants sex role orientation was examined by a series of separate analysis of variance on the participants' Bem masculinity, femininity and androgyny scores.

Effect of Participant's Age and Sex

Separate analysis of variance were performed on the masculinity, feminity and androgyny scores with age (25 and under, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 55 and over) and sex as the independent variables.

No age differences were found for the endorsement of the masculine sex role orientation ($F(4,91) = .07$). A significant sex difference was found ($F(1,91) = 6.84$, $p < .01$). Throughout the adult life span males endorsed the masculine sex role more than females.

A significant age by sex interaction was found for the endorsement of the feminine sex role ($F(4,91) = 2.65$ $p < .04$). Inspection of the cell means revealed that only females 45 and over endorsed a feminine sex role more than males.

No significant age effects were found for endorsement of an androgynous sex role ($F(4,91) = .27$). A significant sex effect was found ($F(1.91) = 10.84$, $p < .01$). Females were more androgynous than males.

In summary, age per se did not affect the sex role orientation of the participants with the exception that females over 45 tended to endorse

a feminine sex role more.

Effect of Marital Status

Separate analyses of variance were performed on the masculine, feminine and androgyny scores with participants' marital status (never married; divorced, separated or widowed and married) and sex as the independent variables.

A significant marital status by sex interaction was found ($F(2, 95) = 4.48$, $p < .01$) for endorsement of a masculine sex role orientation, as shown in Table 1. Married or never married males endorsed the masculine sex role more than those who were separated, divorced or widowed. The exact opposite was noted for females.

No significant effects of marital status were found for endorsement of the feminine sex role.

A marginally significant marital status by sex interaction was found for the endorsement of a an androgynous sex role ($F(2, 95) = 2.80$, $p < .06$) and is presented in Table 2. Males who were never married or presently married were far less androgynous than those divorced, separated or widowed, with the opposite pattern true for females.

In sum, marital status affected the sex role orientation. Married or never married males were more masculine and less androgynous than separated, divorced or widowed males. Married or never married females were less masculine and more androgynous than those females who were separated, widowed or divorced.

Effect of Parental Status

Separate analyses of variance were performed on the masculine, feminine and androgynous sex role scores with participants' parental status (children, no children) and sex as the independent variables.

No significant parenting effects were found for the endorsement of the masculine or androgynous sex role. However, a significant parental status by sex interaction was found for the endorsement of a feminine sex role ($F(1, 97) = 5.13$, $p < .02$). Males who didn't have children endorsed the feminine sex role more ($X = 90.52$) than females ($X = 87.60$). For males and females with children a reversal occurs. Males endorsed a feminine sex role less ($X = 87.69$) than females ($X = 90.35$).

In sum, having children led to males endorsing a feminine sex role less and females endorsing a feminine sex role more.

Effect of Grandparental Status

Looking at those participants 45 and over, analyses of variance were performed repeatedly on the masculinity, femininity and androgynous sex role scores with grandparental status (grandparent, non grandparent) and sex as the independent variables. No significant effects of grandparental status were found for the endorsement of masculine or androgynous sex role orientation. However, significant grandparental status by sex interaction ($F(1, 30) = 8.28$ $p < .01$) was found for endorsement of a feminine sex role. Males and females who were not grandparents endorsed feminine sex role equally ($X = 91.70$ for females; $X = 89.90$ for males) while female grandparents endorsed the feminine sex role ($X = 103.00$) more than males ($X = 87.00$).

Effect of Work/Career Status

No significant effects of being employed or not employed were found for the endorsement of the masculinity femininity or androgynous sex role orientation.

Effect of Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was not affected by the critical life events, and it did not vary with age. However, life satisfaction was correlated with two of the sex role variables. The first was masculinity ($r = .26$, $p < .007$) which indicated that the more subjects endorsed the masculinity sex role items, the more satisfied they were. The second was androgeny ($r = .21$, $p < .03$) which indicated that the less androgenous participants were, i.e., tending toward endorsement of masculine items, the more satisfied they were.

Discussion

The present results suggest that sex role orientations are intricately linked with "life" line events which are themselves correlated with the passage of time. As such, the age/cohort effect can be viewed as playing a more secondary role to the impact of parental status, grandparental status and marital status in the development of sex role concepts. This finding, of course, awaits further longitudinal validation.

It was noted that women's increased androgyny score was due to a decrease in endorsement of a masculinity sex role instead of equal high endorsement of both masculinity and feminine items. Furthermore, it is noted that men's decrease in androgyny scores was due to overwhelming endorsement of masculinity items. It may be misleading, therefore, to use androgyny scales when interested in sex role integration. Also, femininity scores were not good discriminators between men and women of this study. These findings substantiate Emmerich's (1973) contention that masculintiy and femininity should not be differentially defined as is typically the case. Finally life satisfaction was not related to the presence of absence of any critical life event. However, the endorsement

of more masculine, less feminine sex roles was related to greater life satisfaction. While the direct causal links can not be determined, it would be interesting to further investigate how general social values of masculine orientations affect the general well-being and adjustment to life of different age groups.

Generally, the pattern of findings support the notion that sex role development in adulthood is profoundly affected by the timing of various life events, and suggests the need to further explore the coordination of sex role orientations and different life trajectories.

Table 1

Endorsements of Masculine Sex Role As A Function of Participant Sex and Marital Status

	MARITAL STATUS		
Sex	Never Married	Divorced Separated or Widowed	Married
Male	103.60 (15)	98.25 (16)	101.89 (36)
Female	94.83 (12)	100.69 (13)	90.60 (15)

Note: Numbers in parentheses equal the number of participants in each cell; the higher the value the greater the endorsement of the masculine sex role.

Table 2

Endorsement of Androgynous Sex Role as a Function of Participant Sex and Marital Status

	MARITAL STATUS		
Sex	Never Married	Divorced Separated or Widowed	Married
Males	13.08 (13)	9.81 (16)	14.83 (35)
Female	5.82 (11)	9.75 (12)	2.86 (14)

Note: Numbers in parentheses equal the number of participants in each cell; the higher the value the less participants endorsed the androgynous sex role.

Footnotes

[1]Requests for reprints should be sent to Gisela Labouvie-Vief, Associate Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mi., 48202. Preparation of this paper has been supported by NIA Research Career Development Award K04-AG-00018-01 to the last author.

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